Star Raiders 2000 for the Atari Jaguar

While reading the March/April 1994 issue of XIO3, the newsletter of the Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts (Victoria, BC), I noticed Rowland Grant's Atari News & Rumours column mentioned Star Raiders 2000 for the Atari Jaguar. It was scheduled for release in June 1994.

Doug Neubauer's original Star Raiders game for the Atari 400/800 computers is considered a "classic." I have a small selection of cartridge games for my Atari 800XL, and Star Raiders is one of them. I must say, firing photons at those enemy Zylon ships is always an enjoyable experience.

After doing some internet research, I discovered the Jaguar version was never released by Atari. Could it have been as bad as Star Raiders II for the Atari 8-bit? I spent 79 cents (Canadian) to purchase Star Raiders II from Value Village, a local thrift store. The cartridge is grey coloured, with a label featuring the original artwork from the first game. This Star Raiders sequel was originally titled "The Last Star Fighter," based on a movie I have watched several times over the years. Unlike the movie, this game falls under the category of "forgettable."

During the development stage, Star Raiders 2000 had its name changed to Space War 2000 as the game design had been simplified. It was now going to be a space shoot-em-up game, but it was cancelled before reaching completion.

In 2001, B & C Computer Visions released the unfinished test prototype for US-only Atari Jaguar machines. There are YouTube videos available, so I have watched them and based my opinions on what I have observed.

The photon weapon in Neubauer's Star Raiders was one of the major reasons the game achieved such great success. SW2K has achieved similar success with its weapons. I especially approve of the laser and photon combos. The firing of the photons reminds me of those Star Trek movies featuring Admiral Kirk's original crew. Who could complain about pressing the fire button and then being immediately rewarded with eye-pleasing special effects.

Enemy ships have texture mapping. One internet review mentioned the game used the HoverStrike graphics engine, but achieved a much higher frame rate. The gameplay I observed gave the impression that SW2K would qualify as being time well spent. When an enemy spaceship is destroyed, chunks of the exterior textures come apart and fly away. While a decent effect, I would have preferred a more impressive explosion, with differently sized fragments flying in all directions. If a significantly large chunk hits your vessel, this could result in either damage or destruction of your ship. Such an unexpected death would elicit a string of expletives from the player. Game players always enjoy being surprised!

The graphics for the menu screens deserve mention. They are really "trippy" and remind me of graphics produced by a game programmer by the name of Jeff Minter. Some of the fast-moving graphical splotch marks look like llamas. These special effects are called "melt-o-vision," and were borrowed from Minter's Tempest 2000 Jaguar game.

You will notice text that says, "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy psychedelic dog." This phrase, minus the word "psychedelic," is commonly used to test the font displayed on the screen. Another message is "Designed and Programmed by Anonymous Nameless." The designers were Chris Thompson, Lance J. Lewis, and Robert Zdybel. The face, with the third eye in the forehead, belongs to Lance Lewis.

Release date: October 4, 2025

Atari's last stated release date for SW2K was November 1995. Two reasons were given for its cancellation. Game testers at Atari stated numerous bugs and crashes, with an overall lack of polish, recommending cancellation. Secondly, Scott Le Grand and Douglas Engel of 4Play made a sales pitch to Atari regarding their BattleSphere game, and Atari preferred it.

With respect to the opinions of the game testers, their main task is to provide "feedback" to the game developers. All issues raised could have been fixed. Next, Space War 2000 was an Atari internal game project, while BattleSphere was being produced independently. Considering BattleSphere was not released until 2000, it would be safe to assume SW2K would have shipped much sooner.

Atari Corp. agreed to a merger with JTS Inc., a manufacturer of hard drives, on February 13, 1996, with a completion date of July 30, 1996. Preservation of cash reserves for the merger would be the most likely reason Space War 2000 was axed. Other Jaguar games received a similar end-of-life experience.

The last game published by Atari was Fight for Life, a fists-in-your-face fighting game set in a purgatory dimension. This game was released before Atari Corp. entered its own purgatory dimension. Fight for Life was released in North America on January 15, 1996, followed by a release in Europe on April 19, 1996.

The good news is that 1996 was not the end for new games for the Atari Jaguar. BattleSphere made its grand entrance to enthusiastic shouts of "Let's Party from Now to Eternity" on February 29, 2000, followed by a Gold edition on March 15, 2002. I have watched the YouTube videos depicting the gameplay, and it looks "most excellent." Current eBay prices for this cartridge game range from $1,208.90 to $3,500 (with free shipping).

Along with issuing new games for the Atari Lynx handheld game console, Songbird Productions is doing a smashingly good job of keeping Jag owners supplied with games. On their website, Towers II Enhanced is available for $99.99. I purchased the original Towers II on its release date of December 10, 1996. Check their site for other Jag games.

A John Hancock YouTube video, dated May 3, 2025, discusses Reboot Games, an independent game publisher and developer. They have produced some homebrew games, available digitally or on a minicart for the Jaguar. Biopede, a centipede clone, looks interesting. View the Hancock video to learn more about the other titles.

Another source for Jaguar games is AtariAge. Their website has Jeff Minter Classics on cartridge. Llamatron 2112 is a stupendously excellent game. I have played Jeff's shareware version on an Atari ST computer. Also available is The Chaos Engine by the Bitmap Brothers. I have played this two-player game on my ST and it is very funtastic. Visit AtariAge to view their complete selection of Jag games.

Lastly, please keep playing those Atari Jaguar games, but don't forget to occasionally take a break to visit the fridge to collect some "power-ups."